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Kotilainen, Noora

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Noora Kotilainen

Suffering points to experiences of physical or mental pain. Suffering and the act of reflecting on the nature of suffering is a central question in philosophy, religion, psychology, and the social sciences. On the one hand, suffering is a deeply personal and individual experience, one which escapes easy definitions and representation (Wilkinson, 2005). However, on the other hand *social suffering* points to suffering as a societal experience, and in such instances suffering is the result of what political, economic, and institutional powers do to people (or other sentient creatures) (Kleinman, Das, & Lock, 1997). In humanitarian contexts, suffering is a mobilizing force: witnessing the suffering of others triggers compassion and empathy and emotion-driven ethical responses to such suffering, which sometimes leads to humanitarian responses and action (Ashby & Brown, 2009).

Jeremy Bentham (1789) identified the ability to suffer as the precondition for protection against exploitation and exposure to cruelty, a requirement for (human) rights. He famously proposed that the question is not, "Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?" In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith (1758) described compassion for the suffering other as one of the "original passions of human nature." Compassion towards the suffering of others is undoubtedly as old as human culture, but the idea of a universal humanity and a global human community with transboundary moral obligations towards each other—and therefore, towards alleviating the suffering of others—is often traced back to the Enlightenment era. During the Enlightenment, a cult of sensibility and fascination with suffering prompted a surge in humanitarian thinking and action. At the time, the rise of secular thinking gave voice to the idea that humans themselves could and should intervene in the suffering of others—even unknown, distant humans that remain anonymous to us—which helped sow the seeds of modern humanitarian thinking. The recognition of a shared human condition, one bound together with bodily precarity and vulnerability to suffering, formed the basis for ideas of a common human community and the obligation of humans themselves to safeguard our fragile humanity (Sliwinski, 2011; Ashby & Brown, 2009).

According to Hannah Arendt, humanitarianism builds on a "politics of pity," and it divides us between those who suffer and those who do not, those in need of help and those able to help. Therefore, humanitarianism is dependent on the spectacle of suffering, that is, on mediating representations of the suffering of others in the awareness of distant, able-to-help spectators (Arendt 1963). Witnessing the suffering of another, recognizing it as suffering, and reacting to the suffering in a compassioned manner, with a will to help, is at the core of humanitarianism. The evolution of transboundary humanitarianism, and its institutionalism and expansion, may be traced through episodes of witnessing extreme suffering and organizing benevolent, humanitarian responses to it (Kotilainen, 2016; Sliwinski, 2011; Ashby & Brown, 2009).

The birth of modern organizational humanitarianism is often dated back to 1859, in the aftermath of the Battle of Solferino. Deeply impacted by the suffering that he saw and heard at the scene of battle, Henry Dunant wrote "Memory of Solferino" (1862). Inspired by the ideas presented in the book, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was founded in 1863. Similarly, the

anti-slavery movement led to recognition of the suffering of slaves, of slaves as humans capable of suffering and who should not suffer (Sliwinski, 2011; Hochschild, 2005). Perhaps most famously, the horrors of the Second World War, and namely witnessing the immense suffering of those affected by the Holocaust, prompted the codification of international humanitarian laws and implementation of conventions aiming to protect humanity from future atrocities and rights violations. More recently, driven by the genocide in Rwanda and the atrocities committed during the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, the principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) was signed in 2005 by all of the UN member states.

A critical question is: What is it that counts as a life (to our understanding) able to suffer, a life we feel compassion for, a life worthy of grief and mourning? (Butler, 2004). This question is pertinent today with respect to, for instance, the case of legal, mass-scale exploitation of non-human animals and the issue of animal rights.

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